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SCENE OF THE CRIME

A LITTLE PIECE OF GOODNIGHT

BY ED BRUBAKER & MICHAEL LARK

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prologue

I hadn't seen Paul Raymonds in over three years, and I would have been more than happy to keep it that way.

It was around 4:30 in the morning and I was out wandering the streets. A recent case had gone particularly bad, and it had been keeping me up nights.

A couple had hired me to find their runaway son, and had given me enough information to make it pretty simple.

Still, by the time I caught up with him, he'd OD'd on smack and been left to rot in a dumpster in the Mission.

He was only 11 years old, and looking at his fragile little face, I just couldn't imagine why the world would bring him to this end.

I'd seen a lot of dead bodies in my life, too many, but I never got over seeing what death did to the face of a child.

So I was thinking about death when Paul Raymonds stepped out of his car and back into my life...

HELLO, JACK...

SERGEANT. FUNNY TIME OF NIGHT TO RUN INTO YOU...

FUNNY "HA HA" OR FUNNY "STRANGE?"

WELL, THAT REALLY DEPENDS ON WHY YOU'RE *HERE*, I GUESS.

I JUST WANTED TO SEE YOU, AND YOUR UNCLE TOLD ME WHAT KINDA HOURS YOU'VE BEEN KEEPIN' LATELY.

SEE ME, WHY?

BECAUSE IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME, AND WE USED TO BE LIKE *FAMILY*.

AND...

LOOK, CUT ME A LITTLE SLACK HERE, *OKAY*: YOU DIDN'T WANNA SEE *ME* ANY *MORE* THAN I WANTED TO SEE *YOU*.

NO, I GUESS *NOT*. I JUST HOPE YOU'RE NOT HERE TO START DRAGGING OUT THE PAST, BECAUSE --

-- I'M SENDING SOME *WORK* YOUR WAY, AND I JUST WANTED TO LET YOU KNOW SO IT WOULDN'T COME AS A *TOTAL* SHOCK.

WORK? WHY? WHY WOULD *YOU*...

'CAUSE I'VE BEEN HEARIN' GOOD THINGS ABOUT YOU, AND I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE A NICE CHANGE OF PACE IF I CAME TO *YOU* FOR HELP FOR ONCE.

HEY, IF YOU'RE HEADING HOME, YOU SHOULD PROBABLY KNOW ABOUT THAT *LIP-STICK* ON YOUR NECK.

SHE'LL BE BY SOMETIME TOMORROW. TRY NOT TO BE *TOO* MUCH OF A *SMARTASS*...

He was right. We were like family, but in all the wrong ways.

Our bond had become twisted beyond control long ago, and though it was mostly my fault, Paul Raymonds was a reminder of all the trouble I'd gotten myself into--a past I wanted to escape, but could never hope to outrun.

I should have gotten in my car right then and driven to Washington or Kansas, or anywhere, but, of course, I didn't.

EXIT

ART = MURDER

KNUT HEDRIMAN

A LITTLE PIECE OF GOODNIGHT

part one of four

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SCENE OF THE CRIME created by BRUBAKER and LARK

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chapter one

The phone woke me around ten the next morning, and a slightly uptight-sounding woman named Alexandra Jordan informed me that she'd be at my office within the hour.

SCENE... CRIME

My office is right down the hall from my bedroom, so there was no need to hurry, but I did anyway.

I hadn't been this nervous about meeting a new client in quite a while, and it was really bugging me.

Detective Sergeant Paul Raymonds had been my father's partner on the police force, and though we *had* once been like family, I still couldn't imagine why he would send a case to me.

what could I do that he couldn't?

UH, EXCUSE ME...

JACK HERRIMAN
INVESTIGATIONS

THE WOMAN DOWNSTAIRS SAID I COULD GO RIGHT UP. IS MR. HERRIMAN IN YET?

YEAH, THAT'S ME, MISS JORDAN?

CALL ME ALEX... YOU'RE JACK HERRIMAN?

YEAH... SORRY TO DISAPPOINT YOU...

NO, IT'S JUST I... WAS EXPECTING SOMEONE OLDER... YOU'RE NOT WHAT I PICTURED...

I'M *NOT*? DIDN'T SERGEANT RAYMONDS SEND YOU?

YES, BUT HE JUST SAID YOU WERE A *CLOSE FRIEND*, AND THAT YOU WERE VERY *GOOD* AT YOUR JOB.

IS IT ALL RIGHT IF I SMOKE?

SURE... HOW DO YOU KNOW RAYMONDS?

WE'RE... WELL... WE MET THROUGH MY WORK. I'M A TEMP FOR A LAW FIRM, AND HE GAVE A DEPOSITION AT OUR OFFICES.

HUNH... SO WHAT DID HE RECOMMEND ME FOR?

WELL, I GUESS IT'S A MISSING PERSONS CASE, ALTHOUGH WE HAVEN'T CONTACTED THE POLICE, I MEAN, OTHER THAN PAUL. HE SAID PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS USUALLY GET BETTER RESULTS WITH THESE KINDS OF THINGS.

IT REALLY DEPENDS ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES..

...I THINK I'VE GOT SOMETHING...

HERE WE GO...

SO WHO IS IT THAT'S MISSING, AND WHO'S "WE"?

MY MOTHER AND I... WELL, I DON'T KNOW THAT SHE'S EVEN MISSING FOR CERTAIN, BUT IT'S MY LITTLE SISTER MAGGIE. WE HAVEN'T HEARD FROM HER IN ALMOST A MONTH.

IS THAT UNUSUAL? IF YOU WAITED THIS LONG TO EVEN TALK TO RAYMONDS ABOUT IT THEN YOU MUST NOT HAVE BEEN *TOO* WORRIED...

I *WASN'T* AT FIRST, BUT WE HAVEN'T GONE THIS LONG WITHOUT TALKING IN YEARS... I CHECKED HER APARTMENT AND SHE HASN'T COME HOME FOR A CHANGE OF CLOTHES OR ANYTHING.

SO THEN YOU WENT TO RAYMONDS, AND HE RECOMMENDED *ME*? WHY NOT AT LEAST LIST HER AS "MISSING" WITH THE POLICE *JUST IN CASE*?

WELL, MAGGIE'S HAD SOMEWHAT OF A WILD PAST, AND I GUESS I'M WORRIED THAT SHE'S FALLEN BACK INTO HER OLD WAYS. IT COULD BE BAD FOR HER IF THE POLICE GET INVOLVED.

OKAY... WELL, WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SAW HER?

JANUARY 3RD. NEARLY A MONTH, AS I SAID. SHE WAS PLANNING TO GO TO A SEMINAR THAT AFTERNOON. SOME SORT OF NEW AGE THING. I DIDN'T THINK MUCH OF IT...

WHOA, I DON'T KIDNAP PEOPLE FROM RELIGIOUS CULTS IF *THAT'S* WHAT THIS IS ABOUT.

I SINCERELY DOUBT THAT SHE'S JOINED SOME SORT OF CULT... YOU'D FIND THAT PRETTY AMUSING IF YOU KNEW HER.

BUT IF THAT TURNS OUT TO BE THE CASE, I CAN ASSURE YOU, NO KIDNAPPING WILL BE REQUIRED ON YOUR PART. I JUST WANT YOU TO FIND HER, IF YOU CAN, AND SEE IF SHE'S ALL RIGHT--

--AND TELL HER THAT I'M WORRIED ABOUT HER.

YEAH. OKAY. WELL, I'LL NEED A FEW THINGS FROM YOU. A CURRENT PICTURE, NAMES AND NUMBERS OF--

IT'S ALL HERE, EVERYTHING I KNOW. PAUL TOLD ME WHAT YOU'D NEED TO GET STARTED RIGHT AWAY.

WOW, GREAT... A PREPARED CLIENT.

DO YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING ELSE ABOUT THAT SEMINAR? THAT'S THE OBVIOUS PLACE TO START, NO MATTER HOW SLIM THE POSSIBILITY IS THAT SHE HOOKED UP WITH THOSE PEOPLE.

VUNARHOUS

FREE YOUR SPIRIT

THE FLYER IS IN THERE, UNDER THE PICTURES...

...OKAY... YEAH, I'VE SEEN THESE FLYERS AROUND...

IT LOOKS LIKE I'VE GOT ENOUGH TO GO ON RIGHT HERE. I JUST NEED YOU TO SIGN A CONTRACT, AND WE'RE IN BUSINESS...

HOW LONG DO YOU THINK IT WILL TAKE TO FIND HER?

WITH THESE KINDS OF CASES, IT'S EITHER INCREDIBLY EASY, OR INCREDIBLY HARD. I SHOULD KNOW BY TOMORROW NIGHT WHICH ONE IT'S GONNA BE, AND AND THEN YOU CAN DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO KEEP LOOKING.

IF NOTHING PANS OUT TODAY, I MIGHT NEED TO COME BY AND CHECK OUT HER APARTMENT... I GUESS YOU'VE--

MISS JORDAN...?

chapter two

After she left I made a few phone calls and then I let all the facts sink in. Alexandra Jordan was obviously Raymonds' mistress. That explained why he didn't want to handle this himself.

It also explained why he had sent her to me. Regardless of our personal problems, or maybe *BECAUSE* of them, he knew that he could trust me.

And he had to know what these pictures of Maggie Jordan would do to me. She was exactly my type... right down to the quiet sadness in her eyes that most people would overlook.

I was always attracted to the things people tried to hide, but couldn't.

I'M JUST NOT GONNA PLAY WITH A *CHEATER*, THAT'S ALL.

EXIT

OH, I *SEE*; IF I WIN, I *MUST* BE CHEATING...

IF YOU WIN *EVERY* TIME, YOU *ARE*.

HEY, I'VE GOTTA CHECK OUT A QUICK LEAD ON THIS CASE. IF WHITEY CALLS BACK ABOUT A PLATE HE'S RUNNING FOR ME, COULD YOU GUYS TAKE A MESSAGE?

SCENE - CRIME

WELL, I'M GOING *OUT* IN A BIT, BUT YOUR *UNCLE* WILL BE HERE...

YOU'RE GONNA LEAVE *HIM* RUNNING THE SHOP AGAIN?

NOT A WISE MOVE, I *KNOW*, BUT IT CAN'T BE HELPED.

HEY, I CAN *RUN* THIS PLACE *JUST* FINE.

WE'LL SEE. JUST *TRY* NOT TO CRITICIZE THE CUSTOMERS. *IF* WE HAVE ANY.

LOOK, THAT GUY WAS AN *IDIOT*, IT WASN'T MY *FAULT*!

I'LL SEE YOU TWO LATER...

My uncle Knut and his girlfriend Molly had raised me from the time I was twelve.

ARE YOU GONNA PLAY, OR NOT?

SCENE - CRIME

I THOUGHT YOU DIDN'T WANT TO.

Knut is of course THE Knut Herriman, the famous news AND crime scene photographer. He got his start in the forties when he was just a teenager learning to be in the wrong place at the wrong time -- capturing the elements of life most people would like to forget.

EMERGENCY EXIT ONLY

JUST DEAL THE DAMN CARDS...

He rose to fame in the "art world" in the late fifties when, at a reception, he decked Weegee. The two had never liked each other, so it was no big surprise, but if the "art world" loves anything, it's controversy.

Molly and Knut have been perpetually engaged my whole life, but she has always come up with one reason or another to put off the actual event.

The current excuse is that she won't marry him until he retires, which he can't quite bring himself to do.

I had moved back in with Knut over his shop almost four years ago, when I was trying to put my life back together.

Which was a hard thing to do since I'd spent so many years trying to blow it apart.

But I had come up against a wall, and it seemed that no amount of drugs or alcohol could fill the hole I had built inside.

So I spent a few months staring at the ceiling -- trying to imagine a future for myself.

Knut was packing up his office, and so I hung my hopes on the only thing I had ever been any good at -- getting into trouble.

And after a while, things had gotten better. And some of the emptiness had gone away.

chapter three

The local health food store had a more recent flyer for Lunarhouse. They were having their "seminars" every day this week in an old Victorian near the park.

Though her sister doubted it, I hoped Maggie Jordan *had* joined these people. It was the 27TH, and she'd been missing since the 3RD. If she wasn't here, the trail could be pretty cold.

I walked right into the place without anyone questioning my presence.

One advantage of being somewhat young and unkempt is that no one ever suspects that I'm on any kind of official business.

And since they weren't paying much attention to me, I thought I'd nose around a bit before I started asking questions.

Maybe I'd find her here, passing around a joint with the surviving members of the Grateful Dead.

HEY, MAN, HOW'S IT GOIN'?

UH, GOOD... IT'S COOL...

OH SORRY.

SORRY.

LATER, MAN, LATER!

YOU LOST OR SOME-THING?

UHH, ACTUALLY I'M JUST LOOKING FOR A FRIEND OF MINE...

MAGGIE, YOU KNOW HER?

MAGGIE... DOESN'T SOUND FAMILIAR... MAYBE YOU BETTER ASK AT THE FRONT...

I JUST WANNA CHECK OUT THE THIRD FLOOR FOR A SEC, I THINK SHE SAID SHE WAS UP THERE, MAYBE...

I DON'T THINK SO.

SHVVTT!

GUY'S A FUCKIN' NARC!

WHAT? A NARC? NO WAY, MAN!

WHAT THE FUCK!

NOW LET'S JUST RELAX HERE A SECOND, I'M NOT SOME COP...

I'M JUST TRYING TO FIND A FRIEND OF MINE...

AND WHO EXACTLY WOULD THAT BE?

... MAYBE I CAN HELP YOU, I'M MITCHELL LUNA, I RUN THE LUNARHOUSE.

THIS GIRL IS A FRIEND, YOU SAY?

NOT EXACTLY, SHE'S... UH, MISSING AND I'VE BEEN HIRED TO FIND HER.

OH, YOU'RE A PRIVATE DETECTIVE, INTERESTING.

SO YOU JUST THOUGHT YOU'D WALTZ RIGHT IN, HUH?

WELL, THEY DIDN'T SEEM TO MIND *TOO MUCH* DOWNSTAIRS... AND I JUST THOUGHT...

I'LL *BET*... WELL, NO HARM DONE, I *GUESS*...

BUT WHY LOOK *HERE* FOR THIS GIRL?

LAST TIME ANYONE SAW HER SHE WAS HEADED TO ONE OF *YOUR* SEMINARS, AND SHE HASN'T BEEN HEARD FROM SINCE.

HUNH... WELL, I GUESS IT'S *POSSIBLE* SHE'S BEEN STAYING HERE, OR AT OUR OTHER PLACE. *SOME* PEOPLE DECIDE TO STAY...

HER NAME'S MAGGIE JORDAN... THE FAMILY'S PRETTY WORRIED ABOUT HER...

SHE LOOKS FAMILIAR, BUT I CAN'T BE *TOO* SURE. WE GET A LOT OF YOUNG WOMEN IN HERE.

I KNOW SHE'S NOT LIVING WITH US NOW.

BUT SHE *MIGHT* HAVE BEEN?

YEAH, I THINK SHE STAYED FOR A COUPLE DAYS, BUT I'M NOT SURE.

IS THERE SOMEONE WHO *WOULD* BE SURE? ONE OF THESE GIRLS? OR DO YOU KEEP SOME KIND OF RECORD OF WHO STAYS IN YOUR DORMS?

WE'RE NOT ABOUT KEEPING TRACK OF PEOPLE. LUNAR-HOUSE IS A *FREE* COMMU-NITY, THAT MEANS FREE FROM *ALL* OF SOCIETY'S LITTLE STRINGS. WE DON'T ASK FOR TWO KINDS OF *I.D.* AND A CREDIT CARD.

YEAH, THAT'S REALLY DEEP, BUT IS THERE ANYONE WHO MIGHT HAVE SPOKEN TO HER, SOMEONE WHO ORGANIZES THINGS? I MEAN, *SOME-ONE* HAS TO PLAN THESE SEMINARS, AND KNOW WHO'S IN WHAT ROOM, RIGHT?

YOU'VE GOT A LOT OF *NERVE* FOR A GUY WHO SNEAKS INTO PEOPLE'S *HOUSES*, MR. HERRIMAN.

AND YOU SHOULD KNOW, CYNICISM IS NEGATIVE ENERGY.

TRY ILSA, AT THE FRONT DESK. SHE HANDLES MOST OF THE *BUSINESS*-ORIENTED CHORES.

AND PLEASE FORGIVE MY FRIENDS FOR *OVERREACTING* BEFORE. THEY'RE JUST *YOUNG*, LIKE YOURSELF.

I didn't buy Luna's vague memory of Maggie Jordan. He'd reacted to that picture as if it scared him for a second. Ilsa, the unofficial secretary, proved my suspicions...

OH YEAH, I REMEMBER MAGGIE.

SHE STAYED HERE FOR MAYBE... TEN DAYS... I THINK... JUST LEFT ONE DAY, DIDN'T SAY A *WORD*...

WERE YOU FRIENDS WITH HER?

NOT REALLY, SHE WAS LIKE KINDA... *DIFFERENT*, I GUESS. SHE DIDN'T ACT LIKE SHE WAS REALLY THAT INTO THE WHOLE THING, Y'KNOW?

YOU MEAN THE LUNAR-HOUSE WAY OF LIFE?

SORT OF. I MEAN, SHE LIKE *HUNG OUT* AND STUFF, BUT SHE STILL KIND OF KEPT TO HERSELF, LIKE *INSIDE*... THE ONLY ONE SHE EVEN SLEPT WITH WAS *MITCHELL*, BUT LIKE, EVERYONE SLEEPS WITH HIM.

SHE SLEPT WITH LUNA? HE DIDN'T EVEN *REMEMBER* HER...

LIKE I SAID, MITCHELL SLEEPS WITH *EVERYBODY*..

OH, I SEE... WELL, DID THEY SLEEP TOGETHER *OFTEN*?

I DON'T KNOW, A FEW TIMES... HOLD ON, I GOTTA GET THIS...

DDTT... DDTT...

GOOD AFTERNOON, LUNARHOUSE...

NO, I'M SORRY, MR. LUNA IS IN A MEETING, CAN I TAKE A MESSAGE?

...OKAY MA'AM, YES... IS THAT THE WHOLE MESSAGE? THANKS...

IF YOU AND MAGGIE WEREN'T FRIENDS, HOW'D YOU KNOW ABOUT HER AND LUNA?

EVERYBODY KNOWS WHO'S DOING IT WITH *EVERYBODY* HERE...

...THEY ANNOUNCE IT.

YOU'RE KIDDING.

IT'S SO NO ONE CAN GET JEALOUS. JEALOUSY COMES FROM YOUR IMAGINATION...

Ilsa had given me an idea. If things between Maggie and Luna had gone sour, and that was why she had split, it was possible that she might have called here. There's nothing like rejection to help you dial a phone late at night.

Once I found what must have been Luna's personal office recycling and weeded through a bunch of junk from salesmen, messages from an ex-wife, and from a lot of other women, I got incredibly lucky.

WHILE YOU WERE OUT
Maggie
(408) 732-5041

My luck ran out pretty quickly...

HEY! WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOIN'?!! THAT'S PRIVATE PROPERTY!!!

I--UH... I...

SHIT!

HEY!! GET BACK HERE!!!

SKRASHHH!

HEY!!

SLAMMM!

AH, FUCK YOU, YA' FAT BASTARD! MAYBE IF YOU SMOKED A LITTLE LESS POT YOU WOULDN'T BE SO FUCKIN' SLOW!

chapter four

The number that Maggie had called from belonged to a motel called The Sleepy Shores, in Santa Cruz, a couple hours' drive down the coast.

Knut had scrawled a message from Whitey, a friend on the force, saying that the check on her car had come up with nothing. So The Sleepy Shores was my only lead.

SLEEPY SHORES

I didn't want to take the chance of spooking her by asking for info over the phone, so I decided to just head down.

I slipped the clerk a twenty and a line about being from an insurance company...

YEAH, SHE'S HERE. BEEN HERE ABOUT A WEEK OR SO. NAME'S MAGGIE JOHNSON, SHE'S IN #8.

SHE AIN'T THERE, THOUGH. SHE LEAVES EVERY DAY AROUND TWO OR SO...

WHERE DOES SHE GO?

I GUESS, *DRINKIN'*. SHE COMES BACK EVERY NIGHT RIPPED TO THE GILLS... SHE'S A WILD ONE. WON'T EVEN LET THE MAID CLEAN UP HER ROOM IN THE MORNIN'...

Her car was parked in the lot, so she must have walked wherever she was going. But I didn't know how many bars there were around here, and I learned long ago that when you get this close, you stay put, whether you like it or not.

I called and begged Knut to come down. I had no idea how long I'd be staking out this place, but anything longer than a few hours, and you really want someone else there.

You hate to lose a trail just because you ran to piss in the bushes.

SORRY I TOOK SO LONG, KIDDO, MOLLY LOADED ME DOWN...

THANK GOD SHE DID.

ALL QUIET SO FAR?

YEAH... BUT THE DESK CLERK CLAIMS SHE COMES BACK WASTED EVERY NIGHT... SO SHE COULD SHOW ANYTIME...

THIS'S HER, HUH? WELL, THIS'S *MORE LIKE* IT. I'M SICK OF WAITIN' AROUND ALL NIGHT JUST TO SERVE A SUBPOENA TO SOME TRUCKER...

YEAH, I'M REAL *FOND* OF THOSE JOBS MYSELF...

ANYTHING?

NAH.

At midnight, after complaining about how boring this had turned out to be, in spite of the fact that we were waiting for an *attractive* girl, Knut dozed off.

...HUNNR... HUNNNRK...

He came along on stakeouts with me because he used to do the same with my father. It was like a family tradition.

He never talked about it, but I was sure he missed my dad a lot.

...HUNNR... HUNNNRK...

Finally, there was some activity...

It was Maggie, but, unfortunately, she wasn't alone. And she was obviously really drunk, just as the desk clerk had promised.

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so drunk she couldn't even make it through the door.

I bolted without even thinking about it...

HEY!

HEY, MOTHERFUCKER! HEY!!

OOFF!

KISS ARMY

HEY!! GET THE HELL AWAY FROM HIM!!

WHAT TH' FUCK??

YOU BETTER RUN!! BASTARD!

WHAT THE HELL'S GOIN' ON? YOU GONNA LET THAT GUY TAKE YOU?

NAH, I WAS JUST GETTIN' WARMED UP...

I was no fighter--I'd been in enough of them, and I usually got in a lucky shot or two--but it was still embarrassing to get saved by a 68-year-old man.

WARMED UP, HELL. HE WAS ABOUT TO EAT YOUR BALLS FOR BREAKFAST. WHAT YOU NEED IS A GUN, OR A BLACKJACK AT LEAST...

SO YOU COULD REALLY SAP SOMEONE...

NOW WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM? YOU LOSE A TOOTH?

TAKE A LOOK AT THIS...

WHAT, SLEEPING BEAUTY?

NO... WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THIS?

chapter five

I called Alexandra Jordan, but I got her machine. I left a message that I'd found her sister, and that I'd call her again in the morning with the details.

I was glad she hadn't answered, because I wanted to talk to Maggie before I told anyone where she was--so I could find out what she was running from.

I didn't like guns and I didn't like the fact that she'd been carrying around a loaded one.

My father taught me never to point a gun at someone unless you were prepared to kill them. The only time I *HAD* held one on someone, it turned out I *WASN'T*, and things had gone badly. It wasn't a mistake I wanted to repeat.

LOOK AT HER, SHE'D PROBABLY SLEEP THROUGH THE *BIG ONE*...

WELL, WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT.

AHH!

HEY!!

FUCK!

WHAT THE *FUCK* DO YOU THINK YOU'RE *DOING*?!

JUST *RELAX* A SECOND, HOLD ON... I JUST HAD TO WAKE YOU UP...

AH HA HA!

SHUT UP, OLD MAN!

HEY... WHO *ARE* YOU? HOW DID YOU GET IN MY ROOM?

IT'S OKAY... WE'RE *FRIENDS*. YOUR SISTER SENT US...

WHAT? ALEX... BUT... HOW DID SHE KNOW WHERE I *WAS*?

SHE DIDN'T. I TRACKED YOU DOWN.

OH.

SHE MUST BE PRETTY MAD AT ME.

I THINK SHE'S JUST *WORRIED* MORE THAN ANY-THING ELSE...

HUH... SHIT...

YOU BETTER GET HER OUTTA THOSE WET CLOTHES OR SHE'S GONNA GET SICK.

YEAH, *UH*, WHY DON'T YOU GET CLEANED UP, AND WE'LL GO SOMEWHERE AND TALK... MAYBE GET YOU A CUP OF COFFEE...

...SURE... OKAY... WHAT-EVER...

Knut headed home to get some sleep, but my rest was still long hours away.

Maggie and I ended up at an all-night diner by the beach.

SO, ALEX *ACTUALLY* HIRED A PRIVATE EYE... WOW.

WELL, SHE DIDN'T WANT TO INVOLVE THE POLICE, SO WHAT OTHER OPTION DID SHE HAVE?

FUNNY. I THOUGHT SHE WAS PRETTY *HEAVILY* "INVOLVED" WITH THE POLICE *ALREADY*.

I THINK THAT'S SUPPOSED TO BE A SECRET.

YOU DIDN'T LIKE PAUL, HUH?

A MARRIED *COP*? OLD ENOUGH TO BE HER *FATHER*?

NO.

I SHOULD TELL YOU... I MEAN... I *KNOW* ABOUT THE LUNARHOUSE...

THAT YOU *STAYED* THERE... AND YOU *KNOW*... YOU AND MITCHELL LUNA...

GOD, YOU REALLY *ARE* A PRIVATE EYE...

YEAH, SORRY...BUT I WAS JUST TRYING TO FIND YOU, AND IT KINDA CAME UP.

WELL, IT'S *NOT* WHAT YOU *THINK* IT IS, OKAY? IT'S A *LOT* MORE COMPLICATED THAN *THAT*.

IS THAT WHY YOU'RE HERE? BECAUSE YOU'RE ASHAMED?

DIDN'T ALEX TELL YOU WE WERE *RAISED* IN A PLACE JUST *LIKE* THAT?

IT'S NOT LIKE I JUST HAD SOME *COSMIC MOMENT* AND DECIDED TO "*DROP OUT*" OR SOMETHING.

I'M NOT SAYING YOU *DID*...BUT I NEED TO KNOW WHY YOU'RE *HERE*...*HIDING* AND NOT TALKING TO YOUR FAMILY...

AND WHY YOU HAD A *GUN* IN YOUR BAG.

I DON'T *KNOW*... I MEAN, THE GUN, THAT WAS JUST FOR PROTECTION...YOU NEVER KNOW, *RIGHT?*

BUT...YOU KNOW ...I'M SITTING THERE ONE DAY, LISTENING TO THE PEOPLE IN THE NEXT ROOM GETTING HIGH AND DOING IT...

...AND SUDDENLY I JUST FELT *SO* STUPID, LIKE WHAT DID I THINK I WAS GOING TO *FIND* AT THAT FUCKING PLACE?

I MEAN, I *KNOW* WHAT I *THOUGHT*... I WAS LOOKING FOR SOME LITTLE PIECE OF MY FATHER OR SOMETHING... BUT...I MEAN, GOD... HOW STUPID IS *THAT*?

AND THEN WHEN I GOT ON THE HIGHWAY TO GO HOME...I JUST *COULDN'T*..., I JUST WANTED TO DISAPPEAR ...

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FATHER?

HE *DIED*, A LONG TIME AGO. BACK WHEN WE LIVED AT THE COMMUNE... I CAN BARELY REMEMBER HIM.

I'M SORRY.

DON'T BE. I'M PRETTY SURE HE WAS AN *ASS-HOLE*.

HOW DID YOU LOSE YOUR EYE?

MOST PEOPLE DON'T NOTICE RIGHT AWAY.

MY DAD... MY DAD WAS A COP...A DETECTIVE...

HE AND HIS PARTNER HAD MADE A REALLY BIG BUST ON SOME SMACK DEALER IN THE MISSION... MURDER, DRUG-TRAFFICKING, THE WHOLE DEAL. BUT THEY'D FUCKED WITH THE LOCAL GANGS PRETTY BADLY IN THE PROCESS.

IT WAS REALLY HIS *PARTNER* THAT'D PISSED THEM OFF--BETRAYED SOME OF HIS INFORMANTS... LEFT THEM HANGING OUT TO DRY...

SO ONE DAY DAD IS DROPPING ME HOME AFTER SCHOOL--HE'S GOT HIS PARTNER'S CAR, 'CAUSE HIS WAS IN THE SHOP... AND HE WAVES TO ME AS HE GETS BACK IN THE CAR...

AND THAT'S THE LAST THING I SEE...

"Later they tell me I'm lucky to be alive. That the bomb could have gone off any time, 'cause of a bad connection in the wiring or something.

"Then they tell me that I'm lucky I only lost sight in one eye. A lot of times when there's trauma to one, the optic nerve freaks out and you lose the other one, too."

BUT, YOU KNOW, I DON'T REALLY FEEL *TOO LUCKY* WHEN THEY'RE TELLING ME ALL THIS.

OH MY GOD... I CAN'T EVEN *IMAGINE* WHAT THAT WOULD DO TO YOU...

YEAH, IT MESSED ME UP PRETTY BAD FOR A LONG TIME...

BUT, IT'S PROBABLY NOT *TOO* FAR FROM WHAT YOU'VE BEEN FEELING *YOURSELF* FOR THE PAST FEW WEEKS.

MAYBE IT'S NOT. EXCEPT *WORSE*.

NO--PEOPLE'S PAIN IS ALL RELATIVE, IT'S NOT JUDGED AGAINST OTHER PEOPLE'S. YOU CAN ONLY EXPERIENCE YOUR OWN LIFE, AND BELIEVE ME, THERE'S NO SHAME IN *THAT*.

YEAH... I GUESS. BUT STILL, IT CAN KIND OF PUT THINGS INTO PERSPECTIVE, FINDING OUT THAT SOMEONE ELSE HAD IT *WORSE* THAN YOU.

SURE IT CAN, BUT WHO WANTS THEIR LIFE PUT INTO *PERSPECTIVE*?

YOU KNOW, YOU'RE KIND OF A STRANGE PRIVATE EYE.

YEAH, I GET THAT A LOT.

We stayed until a little after three, just talking. It was one of those instant get-to-know-you sessions. Take 2 people, just add coffee.

At some point in the conversation she agreed to call her sister and let her know where she was, and that she was all right.

I didn't press her anymore about the Lunarhouse situation. Maybe I should have, because there was obviously more buried there, but I was never the kind of guy to throw people's mistakes in their faces.

And I was just enjoying getting to know her too much.

After a long, awkward pause, where I think under normal circumstances we might have kissed, I gave her my card, and she promised to call soon.

And as I waited for her to get into her room safely, she kept looking back at me, the way you want them to -- checking to see if you're looking, too.

By the time I dropped her off at the motel, it almost felt more like the end of a first date than the end of a case.

Maybe I saw too much of myself in Maggie, the same self-destructive impulses, the same pain. Maybe that's where our connection came from.

Maybe I thought I could save her the way no one could have saved me.

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Whatever the case, it was a moot point, because she was dead by morning.

to be continued

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